

new friend by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: But no, F/M, Fluff and Humor, also dustin totally ships mileven, also joyce/eleven and jonathan/eleven bonding, dustin wants everyone to calm down and just talk so things get solved quicker, dustin's tired of his shit, he always has to be involved, i love dustin okay he is a precious bean, mike being stubborn, mike's totally jealous

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Summary:

In which Eleven makes a new friend that everyone won't stop talking about, and Mike is most definitely, absolutely, positively not jealous at all.

1. who even is this guy

Author's Note:

i had a plan for this but it just wrote itself

also i love all of my children

It's a chilly Friday afternoon when Mike first finds out about Eleven's new friend.

"...then he tried to impress her by doing some of those fancy schmancy dance moves he does, then- and then, Lucas totally ate shit and Sherry Williams *laughed* at him-

Lucas punches Dustin's shoulder, the latter putting his hands up to defend himself as he laughs. "I did *not*! He's exaggerating!" He frowns as Will tries his best to hold in his laughter while sending him an apologetic glance. "I just... happened to mess up!"

"Yeah, happened to mess up and end up with a mouthful of schoolyard dirt in your mouth when you *fell on your face*!" Dustin holds his stomach as he and Mike burst out laughing, Will joining in with quiet chuckles.

"Ha ha ha. You think you're *so* funny. Wait til I tell the others about what happened on the sixth day of summer camp."

Dustin immediately stops laughing and gasps, making Lucas smirk victoriously. "You wouldn't, you promised you wouldn't tell! Lucas, we did the spit swear and everything!"

"Yeah, well you should've thought of that before you-

Dustin shakes his head rapidly. "You're *not* telling them."

"Wait, I wanna know," Will protests. "What happened in-"

"What happens in summer camp *stays* in summer camp!"

Mike shakes his head and turns to the girl next to him, who is being

oddly quiet. Not that Eleven is the talkative type, far from that actually, but she's never *this* silent when she's with them (usually joining in the teasing and sometimes even holding her own when they teased her, the girl definitely had her moments). He notices the way she's walking with a happy skip in her step and how she's smiling to herself. Mike ignores the fluttery feeling in his chest as he addresses her.

"What's got you looking so happy, El?" He asks, and she turns to him quickly, looking a little startled.

"I, um," She starts, her smile coming back as she fiddles with the hem of her light blue dress, something Mike knows she does when she's excited or nervous. "I made a new friend." Mike's eyes widen with surprise. Eleven is very kind, but she's also timid, especially when it comes to people she doesn't know.

He's happy for her all the same. "Oh, really? That's great! When did you meet her?"

"Out with Joyce. Monday," Her eyes are twinkling with excitement, and he wonders who exactly this mystery person is, because they must be someone really special if they've made her this happy. "He was... loud at first, but he's nice," She tells him, and Mike stops. Her new friend is another boy? (he doesn't know why he's so surprised, and he tells himself it's because Joyce has been talking about Eleven needing to make friends with *girls* her age, not boys).

"What's his name?"

"Russell."

Russell, huh?

"Come on, slowpoke!" He looks up and sees Lucas, Will, Dustin and Eleven up ahead. The girl looks confused, as if she didn't notice he had stopped walking in the first place, despite the fact that she had been walking next to him before. *Because she was busy thinking about 'Russell'.* He frowns, picking up the pace and rolling his eyes when Lucas gestures for him to hurry.

"Hey, mom!" Will greets as he steps into his house, and Joyce pokes her head out from where she is at the kitchen counter, attempting to cook dinner (attempting being the key word here).

"Hey, Joyce," The three other boys chorus, and Eleven walks in silently behind them, still smiling.

Joyce wipes her hands on the apron she's wearing and sighs at the 'mashed potatoes' she had been making. She makes a mental note to have Jonathan give her more cooking lessons when they're both free because she's not going to feed the kids stuff she wouldn't eat herself. "Hey, boys," She places a kiss on Will's forehead and ruffles his hair playfully before hugging Eleven and running her fingers through her short pixie cut. "Hi, El," She smiles when she notices how happy the girl looks. *I knew Russell was a good idea.* "Excited for next Monday, sweetheart?"

Eleven's eyes widen as she looks up at Joyce. "So soon?"

Mike stops following the three other boys on their way to Will's room, focusing on what Joyce had said. *Next Monday?*

"Yeah, seems like Russell's taken a real liking to you."

"Really?" Joyce laughs, tapping the tip of Eleven's nose with her finger.

"Yes, really! Of course he'd like a sweet girl like you," Eleven giggles happily as Joyce bends down to give her little smooches on her cheeks. She likes when Joyce does that, it makes her feel all warm and happy inside. "Mrs. Lyons liked you too, and she said you can come over again next Monday. Now go on and play with the boys while I figure out what I'm going to do for dinner, okay?"

Mike quickly goes to Will's room before he's caught by either of them, and is immediately aware of the questioning stares the others are giving him when he enters. "Where were you, man?" Lucas asks as Will puts another tape into the radio. "Will's been showing us the cool mix tapes Jonathan made him!"

"...Bathroom, washing my hands," He replies quickly. Dustin raises a brow, immediately noticing his friend's odd behavior (because *honestly* he's more observant than people give him credit for).

"Mike, everything cool?" He asks, and he knows that as soon as Mike nods his head, avoiding his gaze, that this is going to be one of these situations in which everything could've been solved easily in the first place with a quick conversation. Dustin closes his eyes and focuses on the music. *Let someone else play peacekeeper this time.* He knows that if he keeps asking Mike if anything was wrong, Mike would be quick to shut him down by either changing the subject, or insisting that everything was fine and a *why don't you mind your own business for once, Dustin?* He chuckles to himself, because the voice he has for Mike in his head is all high pitched and squeaky and sounds nothing like him but he finds it funny anyway.

Eleven comes in then, still feeling giddy from the conversation she had with Joyce in the kitchen, but feels some of her giddiness dissipate when she sees Mike on the bed, frowning. She sits next to him, mirroring his frown. "Mike," She murmurs gently, "Are you okay?" She takes his hand in hers and squeezes it softly, just like he does when they're holding hands and she's sad or nervous.

"Yeah..." He looks down at their hands and squeezes hers back, and he doesn't even realize he's smiling until she smiles back at him. "Yeah, I'm fine, El." The "now that you're here" that is on the tip of his tongue is left unsaid.

Russell sounds like a nerd's name anyway.

-x-

Almost a week later, Will doesn't go to school because he's sick, so Mike decides to stop by the Byers' house and check in on him. He's seated on the couch, eyes on the television screen, while Eleven sits close to him, quietly reading one of the books he brought her from the library. Will had fallen asleep a little while before, and Joyce is in the kitchen, trying to follow the soup recipe Jonathan had taught her earlier today (trying being the key word here).

"Hey, El, you wanna go for a walk?" Jonathan asks, laughing when

Eleven nods eagerly, marking her page and putting the book down on the coffee table before quickly going to her room to get her jacket. Instead of the usual blue one that Mike had given her, she comes out holding a newer looking, brown jacket. Jonathan helps her get it on before getting his own from the coat hanger. "I wanna show you this cool little pond I found. I don't think the ducks have migrated yet, so we might see some swimming around in there..."

"Ducks?" She tilts her head, confused. "Mi...grated?"

Jonathan smiles and bends down so he's at eye level with her. "They're like birds, but bigger," Her eyes widen at this. "When the leaves start falling from the trees, they fly away to another place, because they don't like the cold that comes with winter. That's migrating. They haven't done that yet, so we might be able to catch a quick peek before they leave." He ruffles her short hair, grinning when she pouts and tries to fix it back to how it was. "Mike! You coming?"

Mike gets up from where he's sitting on the couch, zipping his jacket up. "Yeah!"

Since the lab, Eleven never likes to stay cooped up in one place for too long. She likes to walk around and explore as much as she possibly can, now that she has the freedom to. Mike usually accompanies her, answering any questions she may have about what they find in the forest (there are usually a lot, but he doesn't mind, he finds her curiosity endearing). Usually, Mike and Eleven take walks by themselves on weekdays, and Jonathan joins them on the weekends, when he's not working. However, he had taken off today to help his mom take care of Will.

"...Who knows, you might be able to bring Russell along for a walk too. I think he'd enjoy it."

"Yes!" She agrees, immediately perking up.

Mike stops walking, feeling his mood sour. Usually forest walks were just him and Eleven (and Jonathan too sometimes, but it was mostly just the two of them), and it's his favorite part of most days. *Why does she wanna bring him along? It's usually just us.* "...Actually, guys, I

think I'm gonna stay here," He tries to ignore the way Eleven's frowning at him.

She takes a step towards him, and Mike steps away and closer to Will's door. "...Mike?" She doesn't understand, Mike is usually excited to come along with them. There has to be something wrong.

"Will, he... might wake up and I wanna be here to take care of him and... and help him feel better," Before either of them could say or do anything, he goes into Will's room and shuts the door, sitting on the chair by the bed.

It's silent for a few moments and the only sound he hears is the rapid beat of his heart thundering in his ears. After a while, small, light steps make their way towards Will's door, and he tenses.

Then, he hears Jonathan's muffled voice. "...El, come on."

"But... Mike-" If he hadn't before, he definitely feels like an asshole now, hearing her dejected murmur. *Why am I being like this? Maybe I should just...*

"It's fine, El, he's just worried about Will. Come on, I'll show you where the pond is so you know where to take Russell, okay?" Any desire Mike might have to go is mostly gone when he hears that name again.

"...Okay."

There are sounds of tiny steps slowly going away from the door, and the sound of a screen door closing before Mike moves to the window to see them walking away into the woods, Eleven's brown jacket seemingly blending in with the fall foliage. Speaking of which, the jacket does look a little big on her, now that he really looks at it. He had assumed that it's a new jacket, but now...

Why would she get a new jacket that's too big on her? Unless... that's Russell's jacket? He feels his stomach turn at the thought. It could definitely be a possibility, given how much everyone's been going on and on about him recently and how much time Eleven's been spending with him and how happy she's been and... he *really* wants to

know exactly who this Russell guy is, and how he managed to get so close to Eleven in such a short period of time. Based on what Joyce said, they only meet on Mondays. *I have to get to the bottom of this.*

2. ok we get it he's amazing

Notes for the Chapter:

so sorry for the late update!! finally finished my semester of college so i can get back into writing... here's the second chapter! third and final chapter will be uploaded v soon! (and thank u so much for ur comments and kudos!! omg u guys are so sweet) one more chapter after this one! also happy holidays!!

"Hey Joyce," Mike mumbles as he finally musters the courage to walk out of Will's room after numerous self given pep talks.

Joyce smiles at him warmly, carefully chopping up vegetables on a cutting board. "Hey, Mike. How're you doing, kiddo?"

"Good! Good... I was, um, actually just curious about something."

"Is everything okay?"

Mike nods quickly, not wanting to worry her. "Oh, yeah! Yeah everything's fine... Uh, Eleven told me about a... new friend she made on Monday?" He pushes on, despite his fears gnawing at him. *What if she says that they've become best friends? What if she says that Eleven wants to spend more time with him than just on Mondays? Or worse... what if she says that Eleven likes him?* "I was wondering... what's he like?"

Joyce smiles widely at the mention of 'Eleven's new friend', and Mike has to stifle a groan. *Great, even Joyce too?* "You mean Russell? He's the sweetest boy," She returns her attention back to the vegetables on the cutting board, unaware of the inner crisis Mike is going through. "They got along right away when they met on Monday. Mrs. Lyons and I have been planning to make them meet for a while, actually. I just thought Eleven could use a new friend, since you boys are busy with the AV club sometimes, and I work and Nancy's busy with school and Jonathan works and..." She sighs. "You know that she doesn't like being alone for too long. I just thought he'd be good for her and she's been so happy since she met him."

"Yeah," He mutters, slouching in his seat, suddenly not wanting to hear anymore of what Russell was like. "I've noticed."

"She was so scared of frightening him, y'know?" *Because of her powers.* "I'll admit I was a little worried too, but it was like a match made in heaven."

Match made in heaven? What's that supposed to mean?

Mike wants to scream, but he doesn't think it's very polite to suddenly start screaming in your friend's house while his mom was standing right in front of you and while said friend is sleeping in bed with a fever, so he settles for screaming internally instead.

He feels his mood quickly begin to sour, and wants to be anywhere but here.

"Hey, Joyce... I just remembered," He laughs nervously, picking his backpack up from the couch. "I promised my mom I would help with... uh," Joyce looks at him expectantly, raising an eyebrow and in his panic Mike's gaze shifts to the various cooking ingredients on the counter. "Uh, dinner! Promised I would help with dinner. Yup!" He quickly makes his way to the front door before Joyce can ask any questions, and turns around quickly to add, "Tell Eleven and Jonathan for me, please? Oh, and tell Will that I hope he feels better when he wakes up and that Dustin and Lucas'll be here tomorrow!"

"You're not coming with them?"

"No! I uh... have to help babysit Holly! Bye!" Mike shuts the door and picks up his bike from where he left it at the front of the house.

An image of Eleven's sad look after he'd refused to go walking with her and Jonathan pops up in his mind, along with an image of her smiling as she thinks of Russell, and he pedals faster.

-X-

Eleven and Jonathan come back moments later, the girl immediately running to Joyce to tell her about her day, as she always does. "We saw them," She says, eyes alight with wonder and amazement. "The ducks. They didn't... migrate." She looks up at Jonathan, and he nods

to assure that she said the word right.

"They're still there?" Joyce looks at Jonathan in surprise. "I'd have thought they were gone by now."

Jonathan shrugs off his jacket and hangs it up before hanging up Eleven's for her. "Me too," He turns to El with a grin. "Guess they were waiting for El to get a chance to see them before they left."

Eleven smiles at him warmly before she suddenly turns towards where Will's room is. "Will? Still sick?" She asks, her eyes wide with concern.

Joyce nods. "A little, but his temperature's gone down a bit. I made some soup for him with that recipe you gave me, Jonathan, by the way. Which was *not* as simple as you said it would be!" Her tone was stern, but her eyes were playful, and Jonathan scoffs. "Took me a little while to get it to a point where it was *edible*."

"*Mom*. It's *soup*. You literally just throw a bunch of stuff into a pot, let it simmer for a while and you're done."

"Oh, please, it's not that simple and you know it!" She stands on her tip toes, trying to reach for a bowl from one of the cabinets above, and right when she's about to give up and get a chair, Jonathan grabs it for her, "Maybe things would be easier if I could reach half the stuff in this darn kitchen..."

She pours some soup into the bowl, and Jonathan walks near the large pot and inhales exaggeratedly. "Woah, mom, it *actually* smells good. I'm surprised," Joyce rolls her eyes half-heartedly. "And hey, it's not the kitchen's fault you're about as tall as Nancy." Joyce gives him a playful swat on the arm as Jonathan and Eleven laugh.

"You would know all about Nancy, hm?" She teases, pleased to get her revenge when Jonathan blushes and averts his gaze.

Eleven gestures to the soup bowl before holding out her hands. "I'll take it to him," She says. Joyce warns her that the bowl is very hot, and Eleven puts her hands down and concentrates, making the bowl levitate off of the counter and float in front of her. Startled at first

(because she can never get used to *that*) Joyce murmurs a thank you, placing a gentle kiss on the girl's forehead and sending her off.

While concentrating on making sure the soup doesn't spill from the bowl as it levitates in front of her, Eleven gently knocks on Will's door, waiting for a response.

After hearing a groan of 'come in' she opens the door and sees Will, still looking a little pale, but better. He visibly lights up when he sees her, a weak smile making its way on his face, and El smiles back. She puts a folded blanket on his lap and slowly lowers the hot bowl of soup onto it, pulling a tissue out of the pocket of her jacket and wiping her nose off with it. "Sick?" She asks.

"Yeah," Will says hoarsely, and Eleven frowns. "I'll get better real soon though, with you, Jonathan and mom helping take care of me." He looks up at her and gives her one of his gentle smiles. "Thanks, sis," He murmurs, eating his first spoonful of soup. Her heart swells with happiness, as it always does whenever he calls her that. Sis. It's times like these that really remind her how lucky she is, and that she has a *family*.

-x-

"Mike?"

Eleven whispers into the walkie, sitting up on her small bed. She's been worrying about him since he'd left the house abruptly earlier today.

"*Oh, Mike?*" Joyce had said when Eleven asked her where he'd gone. "*He said he had something to do at home.*"

He never leaves without saying goodbye. She grips the walkie tighter, whispering his name into it again. "Mike? Can you hear me?"

"...El," His voice sounds hoarse from sleep, and she immediately feels guilty for waking him up. Mike doesn't exactly sleep often, always staying up late studying for exams or reading comic books. Eleven always makes him promise to get some sleep. He yawns, and she hears faint shuffling sounds. "*Hey, is everything okay? Something*

wrong?" She's smiling and her heart feels warm because of how much he cares about her well-being, often putting it before his own. *"Do you want me to sing to you again?"*

When she gets nightmares, Mike calls her on the walkie, almost as if he can sense something is wrong. He calms her down and tells her a story or sings to her, and his voice is so beautiful and makes her so happy that after a while, she is lulled to a peaceful slumber, with gentle whispers of good night.

"Worried about you," She says. "Are you okay?"

There is silence on both ends for a few moments before a sigh is heard. *"I'm fine, El. How's Will doing?"*

She raises an eyebrow at his attempt to change the topic. "Good. Going to school tomorrow. Mike... are you okay?" She repeats.

"Yeah, d on't worry about it."

"It? Mike... friends-"

"-don't lie. I know El," He sighs again, and Eleven frowns. *"It's... it's just complicated."*

"Did I do something wrong? Are you... mad at me?"

"No! No, you... you didn't do anything, and I'm definitely not mad at you."

On the other end, Mike runs his fingers through his disheveled hair, feeling guilt at having made her feel bad. He's sitting up on his bed, trying to not wake his parents or Nancy with the sounds of his and Eleven's voices.

"Oh... then... what is it?"

He bites his lip nervously, hesitating on whether he should tell her or not. *What would I even say? 'Your new friend is bothering me. I... like you a lot and I don't like that you're inviting Russell to our walks'. What then? It's not like she can just stop being friends with him just because I want her to.* No, after the lab, Mike makes sure that Eleven is given

the freedom of choice whenever possible, something she didn't have before. *I'm not going to force her to stop being friends with someone she's having fun with.* "It's stupid, okay? It's nothing important," Before she can protest, he continues. "Don't feel like it's your fault, and I'm not mad at you. I could never... be mad at you."

There's silence on her end, and before she can say anything, he hangs up, leaving El more confused than she had been before.

-X-

Mike opens his eyes, immediately flinching at the bright sunlight coming in from the window.

He hadn't slept since El had called him.

"Mike! Get out of bed or you're going to be late for school!" His mom called, and Mike's irritation from lack of sleep only ends up growing as she continues to call him down.

He sits up, wincing at the cold floor beneath his feet. "I'm up already!" He shouts back. Stifling a yawn as he leaves his room, he heads straight for the bathroom, already dreading the day.

"...to see him. He's adorable!"

Mike rolls his eyes as he passes by his sister's room, wanting nothing more than to stay in bed all day, and not go to school. Her door is slightly ajar, and he can hear the conversation she's having with one of her friends on the phone. *She's probably just talking about Jonathan.*

"Yeah, his name's Russell!" That stopped him right in his tracks. He moves closer to his sister's door so he could listen a little better. "He's the sweetest. Jonathan told me that he already gets along really well with Will and El," She twirls the phone cord with her slender fingers, laughing at something her friend says. "Yeah, I wish! Eleven's so lucky."

Why is she 'so lucky'? Mike moves away from the door, eyes wide. *First Eleven, then Joyce, and now Nancy? Who is this guy?*

"Michael!" He hears him mom call from downstairs.

"Coming!" He shouts back, hoping to get away from all this talk of Eleven's new friend at school.

-x-

He wants to go home.

"Russell, Russell, Russell!" Will says, as they walk to where their bikes are outside of the school.

Dustin smiles and replies with "Russell!" Lucas nodding in agreement, also smiling, because everyone always smiles when they talk about *him*.

Okay, maybe that isn't *exactly* what they're saying, but that's exactly what it sounds like to Mike. Will brings him up constantly during lunch and no matter how many times Mike tries to change the topic. He tries talking about the new comics he recently got, the camping trip his parents are planning, and even tries hinting at some of his plans for their next *Dungeons and Dragons* campaign. Nothing stopped them! *It seems like everyone's met this guy except for me.*

He isn't angry about Eleven making a new friend; when she'd told him that she'd met someone, he was happy for her. But the fact that Jonathan suggested bringing him along for *their* walks, moments when he's at his happiest and that mean a lot to him (because *she* means a lot to him), and *the way her eyes lit up and how happy and excited she looked when she said yes just-*

"Mike, hey," He turns around to find Lucas staring at him, an eyebrow raised. "Are you... okay? You looked really pissed for a sec." Mike notices that all three of them are staring at him worriedly, and he shakes his head, realizing his fists are clenched when he reaches for his bike.

"T'm..." He sighs, quickly getting on. "T'm fine, guys."

He stops when he feels a hand on his shoulder, and meets Dustin's sharp gaze. "Mike, we can tell that something's bothering you. You wanna talk about it?" He hesitates for a second, considering telling them what was bothering him, before shrugging Dustin's hand off.

"I said I'm fine. I'll see you guys tomorrow," The three watch him pedal away, knowing something was definitely up with their friend. Will begins to go after him but Lucas stops him.

"He probably needs a bit of space," He says, and Will nods, though there is still concern in his eyes.

Dustin sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I'll go after him in a bit, Joyce wants you home early anyway, Will. I'll meet you guys at Will's house later, and I'm bringing Mike along with me, whether he likes it or not."

3. oh so THAT'S him

Notes for the Chapter:

here it is, the last chapter! enjoy! also thank you to all of you who reviewed so far, i really appreciate it all c': (i also wrote a mileven one shot, constellations, feel free to check it out if you're interested!) thank you all for joining me on this short ride (and i'd also like to apologize for my horrible updating, lord i don't remember the last time i was this bad with updating a story) i'll make sure this doesn't happen with future stranger things fics. i have some ideas in mind...

edit: this WAS going to be the end but i kinda wanna do an epilogue of sorts where mike, russell and eleven all go on a walk and mike maybe confesses his feelings or something? hmm...

Dustin calmly makes his way to the front door of the Wheeler house, knocking on the door politely before hearing the familiar "Coming!" from Karen Wheeler. She opens the door, smiling warmly at him as she greets him.

"Hello, Dustin," She closes the door as he steps in before going back to picking Holly's scattered toys up from the living room. "Mike didn't say you were coming over! If he did, I would've made you a batch of sugar cookies to take home, since I know how much you like them."

Ah, Mrs. Wheeler's sugar cookies. One of the greatest and most sought after treasures known to man. Despite his stomach growling at the thought, he's determined to find Mike. *The sugar cookies can wait for now.* He almost sheds a tear, but knows he has to be strong. *I'll come back for you one day, my sweets.* "It's okay, Mrs. Wheeler, thanks," He walks over and picks up one of Holly's dolls, passing it to her with a smile. "I was just going by before I just remembered that I wanted to ask Mike about the homework today."

"Thank you, Dustin," She takes the doll gratefully, putting the toys in

the toy box. "He's upstairs, in his room."

He nods, quickly making his way upstairs. When he gets to Mike's door, he doesn't even bother knocking, because he knows Mike won't open the door for anyone, not while he's in one of *these* moods. Just as he thinks, Mike is laying on his bed, dark blue bed sheets wrapped around him tightly. *Man, he's got it bad for her.* Walking over to the bed, he takes in a deep breath, before bellowing out a loud, "*Mike!*"

"*Gaaahhh!*" The noise scares him into sitting upright, and Mike glares at him, unhappy about the unnecessary way to get his attention. "Dustin!? What the heck was that for? Couldn't you just have... I don't know, tapped me on the shoulder? Anything other than *that!*?"

"Hm," Dustin pretends to contemplate this for a moment, before he shakes his head. "Nah, my way's more exciting. Besides, I couldn't get sugar cookies because of you, so consider that revenge."

"*What?*"

"Tell me what's wrong, Wheeler," Mike frowns. When Dustin calls him by his last name, he means business. Still, he doesn't say anything, instead averting his eyes and ignoring him. "I'm not going to leave until we solve this. The sooner we do, I can go home and take a nap." At Mike's stubborn silence, Dustin plops down onto the carpeted floor.

"...This is my house."

"So?"

"I could just tell my mom to tell you to leave."

Dustin smiles. "You won't."

"What makes you so sure about that?"

"Because I'll tell Mrs. Wheeler that you're upset because something happened at school today."

Mike's eyes widen. "You *wouldn't*." Karen is a great mom, don't get him wrong, but when it comes to things like this, she can be...

persistent. Really persistent. When something is making one of her children upset, Karen Wheeler does not rest until she finds out what it is and find out how she can fix it. He loves his mom for how much she cares about him, really, but he didn't want to tell her that he was upset because Eleven met some boy and he's jeal- *I'm not jealous.*

"Oh, I *would.*"

"Fine!" He groans and runs his fingers through his dark locks. "It was... something at school today."

"Elaborate."

"...At lunch," Mike flinches, as if he's revealed too much.

Something at school today, at lunch? Dustin furrows his brows in thought, thinking back to their day at school. *What happened at lunch that could've made him upset...?* He remembers Mike acting weird while they were talking at lunch. *He always tried to interrupt us whenever we talked about-* Oh. Ohhhhh. *Hm, lemme make sure...* "Fine, Mike," He says, getting up from his spot on the floor, and adjusting his cap before sighing exaggeratedly. "If you don't want to talk about it, I guess I shouldn't make you talk about it." Mike is confused. Dustin usually didn't give up this easily. "I guess I'll just go over to Will's place. Russell's supposed to be over there soon-"

"He's..." Mike's voice is small. "He's gonna be at Will's house?"

Bingo. "Yeah, I'm excited to meet him. Will told me he's really nice, and-"

"Russell this, Russell that," He growls with frustration and Dustin holds back a smile after proving his theory correct. *Aha!* "It's all I've been hearing from everybody! Joyce said they're a match made in heaven, Nancy says Eleven's lucky, you guys think he's awesome and Eleven..." He sighs, his voice now quiet and dejected. "Eleven's so...so *happy* and *excited* to be his friend. *I get it*, he's perfect and way better than me and *of course* El would prefer someone like him over me, someone *everyone* likes-"

"What," Dustin deadpans, because really, *what is he going on about?*

"Just, leave me alone, Dustin," He sighs, staring out of his window sadly. "Go and hang out with *Russell*."

It hits him then, and Dustin just stares at him, *really* stares at him because sometimes, he really feels like he's the only one with some sense around here. *Am I in a movie? I have to be in a movie. It felt like I was in a sci-fi movie when the whole thing with the Demogorgon happened, and now it feels like I'm in a teenage drama.* "Mike you're my friend and all but...you're a real knucklehead sometimes, y'know that?" He sighs and takes Mike's hand, dragging him downstairs.

"Hey! Dustin! Hey, lemme go! What're you even *doing*-"

"Just shut up and come with me. I'm gonna solve your little jealousy problem right *now*. Geez, why does nobody around here know how to *communicate* and *talk* to people about how they're feeling instead of making *stupid* decisions," He shakes his head (does he really have to do everything around here?) "Since you won't listen, I'll just have to show you."

"I'm- I'm *not* jealous!" Dustin scoffs and rolls his eyes, because the way Mike's voice cracked mid-sentence said it all. "If she wants to spend more time with that Russell guy than me she can! I don't...I don't have a problem with it," Sometimes, Mike has moments in which he's very good at lying. This isn't one of them. "And what do you mean *show* me-"

"*Shhh*. Get your bike. We're going to Will's house," He stops momentarily, turning back to shout, "Mrs. Wheeler! Mike wants to know if he can go to Will's house to see Russell!"

She pokes her head out of the kitchen. "Oh? He's going over there today? Joyce told me about how much of a sweetheart he is," *Great! Now my mom is talking about him!* Mike really just wants to go back to bed and be all moody and upset. "Sure, honey. Don't be late for dinner. Say hello to the Byers for me!" Karen goes back into the kitchen before Mike can protest, and Dustin brings his bike over to him as soon as they get outside.

"B-but-"

"We're going."

-X-

Will opens the door and is greeted by the sight of Dustin forcefully pulling Mike onto the porch of his house. Mike is struggling, trying to break his out of Dustin's tight grip.

"I'm not going in there!"

"You're coming in!"

"No, I'm *not*!"

"Yes, you *are*!" The two haven't noticed Will yet, and he just stares, wondering if he should intervene or not. Dustin did say that he was bringing Mike over so that 'he could stop being ridiculous and angry for no reason'. "You're coming in or I swear-"

"Um," They both stop and turn to Will, who looks very confused. "Hey, guys. You... doing okay there...?" (honestly he should be used to his friends and their odd behavior, especially when Dustin is involved).

Dustin nods his head, smiling placidly. "Oh hey Will," Mike mutters a greeting, and Will steps aside and Dustin brings him into the house. "Hey, Lucas."

"About time you guys got here," Lucas grumbles from his place on the couch. "They should be here any minute now."

Before Mike can ask him what he means (he'd like to get some answers as to what exactly was going on), the front door opens, and Dustin watches from the couch as Mike sends him a questioning glance when Joyce comes in through the door.

"Oh! Mike!" She follows his stare and waves at Dustin. "Dustin, Lucas! I didn't know you three were coming over!" Jonathan comes in next, bringing in a bunch of plastic bags. "Jonathan, you can set them down in the kitchen, we'll set everything up later."

Will walks up to his mom excitedly. "Where is he? Is he coming?"

Joyce gives her son a hug and laughs.

"He's coming in with Eleven, sweetheart. Can you help Jonathan with the bags in the kitchen?"

Mike frowns, getting a bad feeling. "What? Who's coming?"

"Didn't you hear me talk about it at lunch today?" Will asks, and Mike has to resist the urge to shake his head. He remembers trying to shut out whatever his friends were talking about because it had to do with... *Oh no*. "Remember? Russell's coming over!" A wave of anxiety overcomes him at those last three words. Mike tries to make his way over to the door again, but Lucas and Dustin block his way out, and he sighs, heading back to where he was.

Then, Eleven walks in slowly, holding something wrapped in a fluffy white towel. "Careful... careful... Be gentle..." She mutters to herself, taking small steps inside as Will walks behind her and closes the door. Mike, however, is confused. *Russell hasn't come in yet, why did he close the door?* She's looking down at the tiny bundle in her arms, smiling, and *why is she always so pretty when she smiles-*

"Hi, Eleven," He mumbles, a little flustered. Eleven looks up at him, surprised, but looks back down quickly when the thing she was holding... moved?

She greets him warmly. "Hi, Mike."

"What's... what's that? That you're holding there?" He's not exactly prepared for the answer she gives him, but when it comes, it's felt like someone's punched him in the face, and everything's everyone's been saying for the last few weeks suddenly make *sense* (also he can totally feel Dustin's gaze on him and it's not helping the whole feeling really stupid thing).

"Russell," She says, eyes soft with adoration as the puppy peers at him with beady black eyes. *Wait-*

"What," Mike deadpans, much like Dustin did earlier.

Dustin gets up from where he's seated at the couch, and approaches, smiling at the pup. "Hi, *Russell*," Mike flinches at the emphasis as

Dustin gives the puppy a pat on the head. He turns to Mike, his expression mischievous, and Mike braces himself. "Mike, this is Russell, the 'new friend' Joyce got for Eleven. Isn't he *adorable*?"

"He's pretty cute," Lucas agrees, reaching out to pet him as well.

Russell's licking Eleven's face now and she laughs, moving to sit down on the couch. The first time he'd licked her hand she was startled, but Joyce had told her that this is his way of giving kisses.

"Wait, Mike didn't know about him?" Will asks, and Mike sort of really just wants to go home and forget all of this ever happened. "Really? But, mom and I told *everyone*!" Yup, he's screaming internally again.

And of course, Mr. I-want-revenge-for-my-sugar-cookies has to speak. "Oh, Mike knows about him alright," Dustin mutters, conveniently loud enough for just Mike to hear.

Mike stares at Eleven and the brown ball of fur on her lap, half listening to what Will is telling him. Apparently, Mrs. Lyons' dog just recently had a litter of puppies, and she's decided to keep two out of the five, trying to find forever homes for the rest. Joyce'd thought it would be great idea to adopt one for Eleven, especially since they'd lost their previous dog, Rex earlier that year. *Now everything really makes sense... Dustin was right, I am a knucklehead.*

"Will, Mike thought Russell was another boy and..." He lowers his voice to a murmur, and Mike can only imagine what he's saying to them. Nothing good, probably.

"Wait, seriously?" Will exclaims. "Is *that* why he's been acting weird?"

"Oh my god," Lucas is laughing now and Mike knows he's never going to let him live this down. "I just... I can't believe..." He wipes an imaginary tear near his eye, an arm around his torso as he continues to laugh loudly. "I'm *never* gonna let him live this down." See?

He blocks out the rest as Eleven looks up at him, and pats the spot next to her, gesturing for him to sit. He walks over slowly, peering at Russel, who's snuggled in her arms (who's cuter, the puppy or the girl

holding him? Definitely the latter, in his opinion).

"Pond?" Eleven asks Jonathan, pointing at the small puppy in her lap.

He shakes his head. "Not yet, it'll be a bit too much to handle, especially since he's in a brand new place," Eleven frowns, and he quickly adds, "But he will be, soon. We'll be teaching him a lot of things while he's growing up. Especially you, as his new owner."

Owner... She's not sure she likes that word, and Eleven quickly decides that she doesn't want to be Russell's 'owner'. "Not his owner... his friend," She doesn't like the idea of 'owning' him, and tries to push away memories of the Bad Man and the lab from her mind that attempt to resurface. But she's excited, excited to teach him things, just like everyone else has been teaching her. She makes a quiet promise to teach him everything she knows, and feels her heart swell when he nuzzles her hand. "Good boy," She murmurs, as she's seen Joyce and Mrs. Lyons do before. Russell yips back at her in response, and she giggles.

Mike, meanwhile, is perfectly content to watch her as Russell fidgets on her lap, taking in her bright eyes and the way she seems to glow with happiness. The guilt comes back to him full force, realizing that he had pushed her away for no reason. *I'm the worst.*

"Eleven," She looks up at him, and Mike takes a deep breath before continuing. "Sorry I was acting so... weird before," He hesitates on whether he should tell her, but her (definitely not pretty. okay... really pretty) eyes watch him patiently, and he sighs. "I just... I thought Russell was..." He takes a deep breath before blurting the rest out. "When you told me that you made a new friend I was really really happy for you but then you told his name was Russell and I thought he was another boy and you just looked really happy when you talked about him-"

"Mike."

"-and everyone was talking about him too and it was getting really annoying because the way they talked about him made him seem like he was just the greatest person ever-"

"Mike."

"-but there was also the fact that you wanted him to come with us on our walks and I knew he was your friend and all but I didn't want him to come-"

"Why?"

Her question makes him stop, heart hammering in his chest. He opens his mouth to answer her question, only for nothing to come out. Mike realizes that *he's* not sure about the answer to her question himself. Why? Why didn't he want Russell to come? Why did the idea of someone else coming with them on their walks bother him so much?

"I didn't want him to come because... b-because..." *Why?* "...I was... I was *scared*," He finally admits, and she tilts her head, eyes inquisitive. "I thought distancing myself from you would make it better, but it only made me feel worse when I saw how much it hurt you. I'm... really sorry for that, by the way."

"It's okay," She replies, but he shakes his head.

"It's not. I was acting stupid," He takes a deep breath before continuing. "When you said you wanted to bring him to our walks, I was upset... because I was scared that you were going to spend all of your time with Russell and forget about me," He finishes, shutting his eyes so he didn't see her reaction. *She's probably laughing at me right now.* "And I didn't want that to happen because..." *Because I like you.*

"Mike," He opens his eyes at her murmur, and looks to see Eleven smiling at him, patient with him, as she always was. *"It's okay. I understand."*

He sees her move out of the corner of his eye and feels something brush his cheek. It takes him a few moments to register that she had given him a kiss, the only sign that it actually happened being the rosy tint on Eleven's cheeks that hadn't been there before.

"See!?" They both jump at Dustin's outburst, and look to see Lucas laughing and making kissing noises and Will looking at them with

wide eyes. "Everyone figured everything out by talking to each other. A happy ending for everyone... well, almost," He grins toothily, adjusting his cap before making his way to the door. "Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a date with some left over pizza. *Then* it'll be a real happy ending for everyone." Lucas' eyes brighten at the mention of pizza, and he follows Dustin out the door.

"See you guys tomorrow," Lucas says, closing the door behind him. Will sighs and gives Mike an exasperated smile, before joining his mother in the kitchen.

It's silent for a few moments, before El nudges his shoulder gently. "Wouldn't forget about you, mouthbreather," She teases, looking down at the dog on her lap. She's trying to hide it, but she's smiling.

He sighs, relieved, his smile a reflection of her own. *Definitely a mouthbreather.*